

REMARKS

The Applicants thank the Examiner for the thorough consideration given the present application. Claims 1-16 and 18-22 are pending. Claim 23 is cancelled without prejudice to or disclaimer of the subject matter set forth therein. Claim 17 was previously cancelled.

Claim 1 is amended. Claims 1, 21, and 22 are independent. The Examiner is respectfully requested to reconsider the rejections in view of the amendments and remarks set forth herein.

Reasons for Entry of Amendments

At the outset, it is respectfully requested that this Amendment be entered into the Official File in view of the fact that the amendments to the claims automatically place the application in condition for allowance.

In the alternative, if the Examiner does not agree that this application is in condition for allowance, it is respectfully requested that this Amendment be entered for the purpose of appeal. This Amendment was not presented at an earlier date in view of the fact that the Applicants did not fully appreciate the Examiner's rejection in the previous Office Action.

Allowable Subject Matter

The Examiner states that claims 21 and 22 are allowed, and that claims 4, 14-16, and 23 would be allowable if rewritten in independent form.

Applicants thank the Examiner for the indication of allowable subject matter in this application. In response, independent claim 1 is amended herein to incorporate the allowable subject matter of objected-to claim 23. Claim 23 is cancelled.

Accordingly, independent claim 1 is now in condition for allowance.

Rejection Under 35 U.S.C. §103(a)

Claim 1-3, 5-13 and 18-20 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as being unpatentable over Lazzeroni et al. (U.S. Publication 2002/0176595) in view of Sekimori et al. (U.S. 5,816,825), and further in view of Slater (U.S. 6, 774,557).

This rejection is respectfully traversed.

As mentioned above, but not while conceding the appropriateness of the Examiner's rejection, but merely to advance the prosecution of the present application, independent claim 1 is amended herein to incorporate the allowable subject matter of objected-to claim 23. Claim 23 is cancelled.

Therefore, independent claim 1 is in condition for allowance.

Claims 21 and 22 are allowed, and claims 4 and 14-16 include allowable subject matter.

All pending dependent claims are in condition for allowance due to their dependence on allowable independent claim 1, or due to the novel subject matter set forth therein.

Accordingly, reconsideration and withdrawal of the rejection under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) are respectfully requested.

CONCLUSION

Since the remaining patents cited by the Examiner have not been utilized to reject claims, but merely to show the state of the art, no comment need be made with respect thereto.

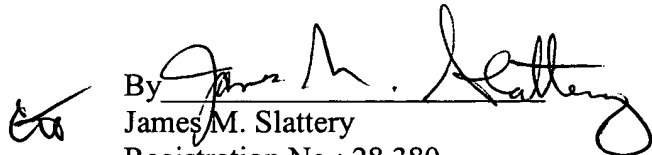
All of the stated grounds of rejection have been properly traversed, accommodated, or rendered moot. It is believed that a full and complete response has been made to the outstanding Office Action, and that the present application is in condition for allowance.

If the Examiner believes, for any reason, that personal communication will expedite prosecution of this application, he is invited to telephone Carl T. Thomsen (Reg. No. 50,786) at (703) 205-8000.

If necessary, the Commissioner is hereby authorized in this, concurrent, and future replies to charge payment or credit any overpayment to Deposit Account No. 02-2448 for any additional fees required under 37 C.F.R. §§1.16 or 1.17, particularly extension of time fees.

Dated: August 22, 2005

Respectfully submitted,


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